

Plan, Observe, Tinker, and Teach in Preschool

Saameh Solaimani: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us for today's Teacher Time episode on Plan, Observe, Tinker, and Teach in Preschool. I'm Saameh Solaimani.

Becky Sughrim: I'm Becky Sughrim, and we are from the National Center of Early Childhood Development Teaching and Learning, or NCECDTL.

Saameh: Let's start our time together by watching a video. As you're watching the interaction, type in the chat what you notice about the educator and what you notice about how the educator is engaging with the preschool children. You can use the chat for that.

[Video begins]

Teacher: Hey, what's that he's holding over his head? What is that?

Child 1: Rain.

Teacher: It is raining. What is it?

Child 2: An umbrella.

Teacher: An umbrella. We use an umbrella to protect us from the rain.

Child 2: Sometime mommy say we had to get a jacket and an umbrella.

Teacher: When it's raining outside, mommy says you need a jacket and an umbrella, so you won't get all wet.

Child 2: My sister has to get an umbrella, too.

Teacher: Your sister has an umbrella, too. Do you carry an umbrella, Faith?

Faith: Yeah.

Teacher: Yeah?

Faith: Yeah!

[Video ends]

Saameh: What a sweet moment. I love how engaged the children are in this active storytime. The children are expressing their natural curiosity about the page, the illustration, and the subject through their sharing their experience and personal stories as the teacher listens and asks open-ended questions to understand more about the children's understanding of umbrellas and how to prepare for rainy weather.

I wonder where this teacher might go next now that she's observed the children's excitement around umbrellas. Let's see what we have in the chat. Welcome, everyone. Looks like we have a lot of introductions. Child engagement.

Becky: That's the one I saw, too, Saameh. I also saw a viewer comment that the teacher is using eye contact, listens, and repeats what the child is saying. She asked questions.

Saameh: So many great things. And a combination of more introductions. Welcome, welcome, welcome. Happy to have you here.

Becky: Today we're going to be talking about planning, observing, and tinkering in preschool. We will look at the framework for effective practice to think about how planning, observing, and tinkering fits into the second pillar of the house. We're also going to practical – some practical strategies, of course, and how we can partner with families around observation and documentation. We'll also discuss ways to modify the learning in setting and individualize teaching and learning for children in small change, big impact. Of course, we will check in with our Teacher Time librarian, Emily Small, during our BookCASE segment.

Finally, we will wrap up our time with some ways to promote your wellness in All About You. I also want to call your attention to the viewer's guide. You will find it in the resource widget. This viewer's guide is full of resources. It has places to take notes. It also has a preschool book list you can use. We encourage you to download the guide and use it throughout our time together for notetaking, reflecting, and planning how you can use these Teacher Time practices in your learning setting.

Saameh: Before we move on, I just wanted to give a quick shout-out to the Teacher Time team, that we have some – Katie and Virginia are helping out with the Q&A in the chat, and Ryan and Dougal in the studio helping with the production. Thank you all. It takes a team, and I wanted to say that before we move on. I meant to say, give that shout-out. Now we are going to — well, if you're new to Teacher Time or, as a refresher, NCECDTL uses a house to represent six integral elements of quality teaching and learning for children ages birth through 5 and all program options. And the six elements of the Framework for Effective Practice include, as we see here, the foundation.

That's providing nurturing, responsive, and effective interactions and engaging environments. Then on the left side we see implementing research-based curriculum and teaching practices. The right side, the right pillar, using screening and ongoing assessment of children's skills. And then, in the roof, we have embedding highly individualized teaching and learning. At the center, of course, engaging parents and families. And the framing or siding, strengthening equity-focused practices, which surrounds the entire house.

Today we're going to focus on planning, observing, and tinkering with our teaching practices and ongoing assessment, two of the very important pieces that strengthen equity-focused practices. We're going to be exploring the concept of our role as teachers, teachers as researchers and how that shift in perspective around our daily teaching practices can help us to draw upon the curiosity of children to foster joyful teaching and learning. Before we jump into our content today, we want to hear from you. Please put in the chat and let us know in what ways is being a teacher like being a researcher.

We'd love to hear how you act as a researcher in your learning environments. What are some things that you do in your learning environment that are similar to what a researcher does? Are there certain routines that you have in place? An example might be inviting children to share their stories about their drawings and transcribing their words or asking an open-ended question to understand more. I remember the more that I – when I was in the classroom, I

remember the more I would ask, listen, and be present with the children, the more curious I would become, and the more engaged we would all become as a learning community.

Working together as we explored and shared our understanding of whatever was – we happened to be exploring at the time. It could be butterflies or recycled materials, emotions, and there were just – there were so many things to be curious about together. We'd love to see what your ideas in the chat. See, looking for ways daily to connect. Yes. Open-ended questions. Observing, yes, which we'll talk a lot about today. Listening and observing. A lot of wonderful ideas. Thank you so much.

Becky: OK. We have lots of wonderful ideas in the chat. Just like Saameh had said, thank you for sharing your ideas of asking open-ended questions, having back-and-forth conversations, data collection. Let's see your words in action and what this might look like in a preschool setting. As you're watching the video, we are encouraging you to please share in the chat how you see this specific teacher in the role of researcher. What do you see them doing or asking or saying that makes you think they are a researcher? Let's go ahead and watch the video.

[Video begins]

Child 1: It's a roly-poly.

Teacher: Because, when you touch it, what does it do?

Kira: Rolls up into a ball.

Teacher: I know. Should we try it? Can I try it?

Kira: With tweezers.

Teacher: Ready, Dylan?

Dylan: What you found, guys?

Teacher: Kira found a roly-poly, and I'm going to see if I can make it go into a ball because she said, if you touch it, it goes into a ball. And that's why they call them roly-polies because they're going to roll. He doesn't want to come out – oh! I got it. OK. Let's see.

Kira: Roll into a ball.

Teacher: Why don't we – we'll look and see if he turns into a ball. Come on. Ball, please. Maybe he'll listen to you. He tickles! His little legs are really soft. It tickles my hand. Makes me jump.

Child 1: Maybe he was like, "Oh, no, no."

Teacher: It's gone into a ball. Look at his legs.

Dylan: Like he said, "Hey! Let me out!"

Child 4: He's rolling to a ball.

Teacher: He is. That's what Kira told me – they rolls. Ew! What's the liquid stuff?

Child 1: I might find this later.

[Video ends]

Becky: Such a wonderful video. I love all the comments. Some of the things, I'm going to look through the chat here. I'm scrolling down to see what we have, some more introductions. Looks like some of the things that came up were asking questions for extending the learning, describing words. They were looking. The teachers are always looking for ways to work with children, asking what happens when they touch the roly-poly. They're repeating the child's observations, testing predictions, and experimenting.

I can't keep up with all these messages. I realize I was way far back there when I started. She's asking questions and keeping the children engaged. And many – like many of you have mentioned, one of the things that I noticed is how present the educator was in this video, that she was in the moment with the children, kneeling down, engaged in exploration, asking those open-ended questions. We also hear the educator invite and wait for the children to respond and share their ideas.

I'm curious to know what the teacher is going to do next. What materials or experiences she might provide in the learning environment to support this interest and deepen the children's learning and curiosity around roly-polies. Thank you, again, so much for sharing your ideas in the chat and your thoughts.

Saameh: As we heard from your responses earlier, teachers are already engaging in these practices daily. It's something that we're doing daily anyways. Awareness and attention towards what we are already doing, it can help us shift our perspective in ways that allows us to do all of these things to gain a deeper understanding of the child as a human being, which leads to a greater capacity to engage in a responsive relationship with the child.

Learn about children to individualize care, and the curriculum, including interactions, teaching practices, learning experiences, routines, schedules so really being able to individualize through understanding each child and that specific learning community. Understand and follow children's progress and acquiring skills and concepts over time as part of the ongoing assessment cycle. And to last but certainly not least, explore our own curiosity and wonderments, which is a big part of the joy of teaching.

Teacher as researcher recognizes that relationships between caring trusted adults and the children they care for provide the secure base that is the foundation for learning. When children feel safe with, connected to, and supported by the adults around them, they are more likely to explore and experiment. When we view ourselves as researchers, our role includes that of observing, like a lot of you were saying earlier, and documenting learning processes to understand where to go next with the curriculum and teaching to best support the child's and entire learning community's development and growth across all domains.

This, again, perspective shift – we're using that phrase a lot – this perspective shift supports our understanding of children's progress and ongoing – and the ongoing assessment cycle. And children, as we know, are constantly showing us what and how they know. When we take a step back to look and listen, we can understand more about where the child is, their progress, and where they might need extra support. Another piece of this is data collection, which we'll be discussing more about in the teacher toolbox, where we'll share practical strategies for data collection in the classroom.

Becky: Another big part of the joy of teaching and learning is staying curious. I saw in the chat that someone had just put to teach is to learn. I think that's a big joy, that we're staying curious, and we're learning alongside children. It's also about being present and being open to what's happening in the moment and what makes us wonder and then thinking, "I'm wondering about this, and now where can I go next in our learning community?"

Also, teacher as researcher does support an equity mindset by first keeping children and families at the center, by also becoming aware of our own biases and assumptions through objective observations and through the tinkering process. It's – also supports us in understanding or providing an opportunity for us to understand and become aware of how biases and assumption can lead to attitudes and beliefs and actions towards children and families, particularly those who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, and other children and families of color or children with disabilities in their families or families who are members of the LGBTQIA2S+ community.

Saameh: Go ahead, Becky.

Becky: Sorry. It took a minute for me. I guess I needed a moment to pause and be in the present. Now we have talked about what it means to be a teacher's researcher and why it's important. Let's talk about how we can engage in this process. We're going to think through three different steps – plan, observe, and tinker – and we're going to walk through this graphic together.

And as we go through each step, we encourage you to think about how that step invites us to increase our intentionality and how that strengthens equity-focused practices that ultimately lead to all children and families in our care being seen, heard, and valued. Let's start with plan. In this step, it includes planning times to observe a child. In order, as you all know, to capture the depth and breadth of children's skills and abilities and interests, it's important that we observe at different times of the day and in different settings.

We might observe children across settings inside and outside or at different times of the day, in the morning and in the afternoon. We also might observe children during routines, like mealtimes and circle times, arrival or departure and as they engage in play experiences and also as they move from one play experience to another and also how they interact with other children and adults. It's also really important to remember to plan for spontaneous observation opportunities. As we all know, young children are showing us what they know and how they know and how they can do things all of the time.

For teachers, for us to be like researchers, we have to be ready to collect data at really any time. Sometimes it's helpful and, most important, to be prepared for those moments. Just kind of sounds funny, being prepared for something spontaneous, but we can be prepared by putting notetaking materials like writing tools, index cards, sticky notes, or mailing labels, any kind of writing utensil in strategic places around the room.

Or maybe you wear a smock or an apron, so you have nice big pockets that you can put some of those materials into the pockets or in a home visitor bag. As always, I think this is a hopefully friendly reminder for all of us to make sure that our camera and audio and video recording devices are in working order and fully charged.

Saameh: Those are some great tips, Becky. The next step is to observe, which includes gathering data. We spoke a little bit about data earlier. What is data? The data collection process supports objective observation in the learning environment. When we're focused on noticing what's happening in the moment, we are likely to be more objective and to gain a better understanding of what the child is communicating. And this practice also supports becoming aware of our own biases and assumptions, which is a really important piece of the teacher as researcher process.

I mean, because we are human, we have our opinions and our ideas of things. This process really supports us to ensure that what the child is communicating is being seen and heard with its original – as much of its original intent as possible. Families are also important partners as we gather data. One way to support gathering data from families is to include maybe a journal or a folder for each child where families can add notes in their observations and their observations, where families can add their notes and their observations.

There are many ways to do this. We'll have a few other ideas later on in the webinar. Then, after we gather the data, we need to organize it. That's a big piece. Organizing it through these are things that can be done earlier on to kind of support the process all along, which is setting up the systems. We can align our data collection system with an assessment tool that we're already using so that it's complementing that. An important step is to decide how observations will be organized and stored.

There are many ways this can be done. We can choose what works best for us. Each situation is unique, and you can decide what's best for you, for your environment, for your community. Some examples are having maybe a folder for each child and hanging files in a file cabinet, large box, or crate; index cards in a file box with a section for each child; maybe a three-ring binder notebook or one of those accordion folders for each child; and – lost my notes here.

Let's see – and/or an online child assessment system, which I know a lot of people are using nowadays. It can be helpful to plan for times throughout the day. This is another big piece to kind of plan, in the planning of the whole assessment, ongoing assessment, and authentic assessment cycle is that it – planning times throughout the data file observations and all the rich data that you've collected. This could be at planning time, beginning or end of the day, or at the end of each week. This step is really important.

As we all know, if we wait too long, observations, they can pile up quickly or get lost during the busy day or week or get maybe misplaced in the recycling bin. This rich data, this, these kind of gems that children are showing us what and how they know, we can collect that and make sure that they're put in places that can support our intentional curriculum development and so many other wonderful things in our learning environment.

Becky: Then our next step is to tinker. This is where we decide how often do we want to review our observations. The more frequently we review observations – maybe daily, weekly, bimonthly – the sooner we have the information we need to respond appropriately to each child and plan accordingly. Reviewing observations often and consistently ensures that all children in the learning environment are provided with an opportunity and that meets their

needs and nurtures their unique ways of knowing and being as an individual and a part of the larger learning community.

It's also important to think about here who you are going to review your observations with. Is this your teaching team? Is this your coach? Is this the family of the child? And we also want to think about who can be a part of the tinkering team and will support us and checking in with our biases through looking at those objective observations. Then we want to interpret data. And based on the data that we've – that we have observed, what we've recorded, that we've collected, then we start to think about what do I make of what's happening here? What questions do I have about the data that I've collected and about what the child is showing me?

And those questions are an important part of the process as we move into the next step of the tinkering phase, which is when we start to tinker or adjust our learning environment and/or our interactions in order to deepen and extend the child's learning. Let's walk through what plan, observe, tinker looks like in a preschool learning environment. We just talked about it, so let's see it. And this first step is to plan. And here in this picture, on this slide, there is a preschool teacher outside with a group of children.

She's set up a table with two buckets of water and a variety of sponges of different sizes and colors. And we also see that the teacher has set up a chair next to her with chart paper and an easel. When she set up this learning experience, the educator wanted to support learning in the ELOF – for the early learning outcome framework – preschool scientific-reasoning domain. This is Goal 1 where the child observes and describes observable phenomena – just always a word that gives me a hard time. I think I said it right. I hopefully said it right, but you know what I mean – are objects, materials, organisms, and events. Thank you for giving me grace on my pronunciation of that word.

Saameh: It is a kind of a tongue twister. Now let's engage in the observation step. We're going to watch a video of a teacher outside with a group of preschool children. I love this because out – this is an observation is also – can also obviously be happening outside. This is an example of how that can be happening because so many – so much – there's so much rich learning and exploration.

We had another example of that earlier. These are some great outside examples of – OK. This is a group of pre – we're going to watch a video of a group of preschool children as they explore sponges and other objects in the water. As you're watching, we're going to invite you to take some observation notes. What you can do is, in your viewer's guide, there's an anecdote – anecdotal record notecard available for you to record your observations.

As you observe, try to objectively record what you see happening and how the children are engaging in the learning experience. You can either choose to observe one child or observe the whole group. Here we go. We're going to start this video.

[Video begins]

Child 1: Again, I can touch the boat.

Teacher: You can be touching them and seeing them and seeing what they do.

[Children speaking indistinctly]

Teacher: Wow. That sponge appeared? Did it start out as a sponge? Did you see it before? Did you see it a minute ago?

Child 2: Look it.

Teacher: Was it a big sponge?

Isabella: What's that for?

Teacher: Oh, that's a good question. We're going to write down some things after you guys look at those a little bit.

Isabella: Wow. This squirts.

Teacher: That's ...

Isabella: The sponges squirt.

Teacher: That's a very good observation. I think we're going to write that down. You have an observation.

Isabella: Water comes out of it. When you put it in the water, and you take and twist it.

Teacher: I need to write that down, Isabella. She noticed that sponges squirt. What does that mean, to squirt?

Isabella: When water comes out of something.

Teacher: That's right. OK. I'm writing down sponges squirt. Water comes out.

[Video ends]

Saameh: I just love that video so much. Hopefully, you had the time to observe and take some notes, whether it's in your viewer's guide or on a piece of paper. Now that we've done it, let's think about the next step, which is tinker. We'd love to invite you, again, to share in the chat.

How do you think the teacher might tinker with the environment, materials, or interactions to help support learning in the ELOF preschool scientific-reasoning domain Goal 1, child observes and describes observable – observable phenomena, objects, materials, organisms, and events. That is a tough one, Becky. Some – my thoughts, share a few ideas while we're waiting for audience ideas. My first thought is tinkering with the materials in the buckets. Maybe the teacher includes different materials like paper towels or pieces of cardboard.

She might also add another bucket allowing for children to have a bit more space while exploring how the materials interact with the water. Let's see what some people are saying in the chat. Discuss words and their meaning. It's a great opportunity for vocabulary building. So many – adding food coloring to the water. Such cool ideas. Yes. Exploring the concepts of sink and float.

As you – oh, add bubbles to the water. Oh, that's really cool. So many ideas. The children has different sizes of sponges, including materials that do not expand or grow and look at both side by side. Yes. So many ideas.

Becky: They're all coming in now, lots and lots of them.

Saameh: As you all get your answers, and I just wanted to share a few more ideas. In the tinkering phase, I think it's also important to know that we can tinker with our expectations. Maybe this is adjusting our own expectations of what showing interest in and curiosity looks like for each child. Again, as I said earlier, we're human. We come to the kind of scene with our own ideas of how things should be.

This whole process really supports us in kind of moving away from how things should be and looking at how things are. Maybe this is adjusting expectations of what curiosity looks like for each child. It could also mean offering the learning experience with a different goal in mind. Maybe the teacher offers this activity again later in the week, focusing on a different ELOF goal. So maybe the teacher considers a goal within the social-emotional domain to support the children and engaging in cooperative play with one another, as we can see, is something that's happening here. Maybe to focus on that.

Or she might consider a goal in the perceptual motor and physical-development domain. We see them with motor skills working with their hands. I see many, many more comments. Yes. Adding oil-based things. So many cool – wow. I want to try all these. So much fun.

Becky: Let's jump into our teacher toolbox. In this segment, we share practical strategies to support teaching with ease and joy. It will include also some strategies to support your role and our role as researchers and tinkerers. Let's check out what's in our toolbox today.

Saameh: Wow. Look at this full toolbox. There are many ways to document observations. We'd love to hear from you. Again, please use the chat. This is really a learning community, and we want to hear all of our voices. We know you have so much wisdom and experience, and we all benefit from hearing that. Please use the chat and let us know what are your top tools for collecting observations. We've been talking a lot about teachers as researchers throughout this webinar.

We know that researchers need their tools to collect data. Let's hear more about this, drawing upon the collective experience of this learning community. Let's see. Running records. Oh, Little Feet Learning Academy. It sounds – I wonder, is that a online learning tool? Yes. Keeping engagement is important. Pictures and videos. Student work. Yes. Work samples. Yes. We can see that many of these examples being shared are like what we have here on the slide.

We can document observations through video, collecting work samples, like somebody said earlier. Somebody just said in the chat the different forms of artwork or recording children's words and our vocalizations. We can document your pictures like taking photographs of a child's block structure or writing their name or anything that you're curious about that might support your deeper understanding of the child's development.

We can also use checklists and communication with families. A great way to communicate with families through documentation is through maybe a bulletin board or a public, easily accessible space where families can see or read about what's happening in the learning environment and can be invited to share questions or connections. This supports our data collection process as we understand more about the child through interactions and relationships and relationship building with their family.

We see a lot of great on-the-spot documentation. That way – Becky was talking about earlier – having those tools available and ready so you can document and having all your things charged and your cameras ready to go, having enough space on them and everything. When we document observation continuously and collect multiple forms of observation, like we're saying, work samples, anecdotal notes, pictures, you can bring all of those together to create a child portfolio. This may be something that you are already doing.

These portfolios can be very helpful in seeing an overall view of what the child is learning and doing and can help to see development over time. They're also wonderful to share with families – so that family engagement and communication piece. This is a big one: remember to date your observation. Our data is telling us a story about a child's observation over a period of time, so writing the date on what we collect is key. And find a tool or method for observation that works best for you.

There are many, and different ones work well for different people. It might be handwriting observations with a pen and sticky notes or on a clipboard. It could be using a tablet or a smartphone. We encourage you to try out different ways and see what works best. Also, don't forget to check out the resource list in your viewer's guide for tips and tools on how to document the learning happening in your environment. Use that viewer's guide.

Becky: Another way to document observations is through an anecdotal note. We can use this anecdotal record notecard we have here on – in the PowerPoint. You also have it in your viewer's guide. I also saw a participant just recently write anecdotal notes in the chat. That's exciting. We're all thinking the same thing. This notecard includes space to write contextual information about what child you're observing, who's observing, the date and the time and the setting. It also provides a space at the bottom that allows you to write what you saw and what you heard.

Again, you can find this notecard in your viewer's guide. You can also find it on the ECLKC website. We encourage you and invite you to print out the notecard and place them throughout the learning environment. Again, like we've said and like you all know, sometimes the biggest thing about recording observations is having those tools ready and available.

Now let's go into our next segment, Small Change, Big Impact where we share how small adjustments to the way we set up our learning environment modify our curriculum or engage with children can make a big difference in a child's learning. Today we're going to hear from Dr. Gail Joseph. She is going to let us know and give us some information about how we can use observation and documentation for IEP goals. Let's hear from Gail.

[Video begins]

Dr. Gail Joseph: Well, preschool children with disabilities or developmental delays may have an IEP or an IFSP. And, on those IEPs and IFSPs there are goals and objectives. And progress on these individualized goals and objectives can be noted using the same observation and documentation strategies that we've been discussing on this episode. Using a portfolio is a great strengths-based approach to supporting a child's development because you're documenting what the child can do, not what they can't do.

Here are some steps for using portfolio assessment to document children's developmental progress on their IEP or IFSP goals and objectives. First, you would introduce the portfolio process to the family as individualized goals and outcomes are being identified during the IEP team. Then you want to decide the focus of the portfolio with the family and the other teaching team members. For example, maybe parents want their child to improve their hand-eye coordination and control while using various writing implements or art materials, such as when they're drawing, painting, coloring, just like you might see in this picture of this young child.

Third, you want to identify the method of documentation and roles of the team members. Just like we discussed, there are so many methods of collecting information on a child's development and learning. You could use checklists, how many times the child is picking up a writing implement. You can use anecdotal notes to describe the times during the day that the child is using them. You could take photos. You could create videos of the child.

You could collect the actual artwork that the child has been working on with perhaps a note on there about how they used their hand-eye coordination to control the art material. Then the same is true for documenting a child's progress on individualized goals and objectives as you would with any goal and objective. Then parents, caregivers, and educational staff can decide how they want to collect the information, how often they want to collect the information, and how they will share their observations back with each other to document progress.

For examples, maybe our parents want to share photos from their child – from their phone showing their child using hand-eye coordination as they're eating with different utensils. Maybe the educational staff will take anecdotal notes and capture some videos and the actual student artwork, like you've seen here. And they agree that they're going to share the updates maybe once a month at a meeting or through some type of collaborative journal.

Fourth, you want to collect possible entries or artifacts. Just like we've talked about, the team might collect documentation of the child's progress together using a collection of photos, videos, and then actual kind of art materials or places where the child has been writing or making marks on. Then, finally, we would assess the child's progress on the IEP goal and then determine if we want to tinker with the environment to help support the child more robustly.

For example, if the child in our scenario was not making progress, maybe the team would decide that they would tinker by using different types of writing utensils or implements, maybe something that's more attractive and fun like a big wiggly pen that the child might be more excited to grab and hold onto as they're making different marks that could be more fun and engaging.

Maybe it might be incorporating more of the child's favorite things like characters or colors or even peers that they want to work with while they're doing the art activity. That's how you might use a portfolio assessment to document a child's progress on an IEP or IFSP goal and objective.

[Video ends]

Saameh: Wonderful. Such great information. Thank you, Gail. Thank you, Dr. Gail Joseph. I just wanted to check quickly before we move on, address something I see in the chat. How many

times should you do anecdotal notes per week? There isn't really like a one-size-fits-all model. It really depends on your learning environment, on your situation. What are you curious about? What are you trying to understand?

Are you trying to understand what it is that – at what points is this – I'm trying to understand at what points is this child more engaged, and how can I use that to support engagement in another activity? Maybe you're taking notes on that particular child throughout that week to see – maybe you're – maybe it's how the learning community is working together around a certain lesson or project or kind of curriculum.

There isn't a one exact – one answer to that – fortunately, unfortunately, I think – because you can really tailor this to your own situation. I would say there – there isn't – it's always a good time to listen and observe and to hear and see, you know, what the children are trying to communicate to us so that we can know where to go next intentionally and really support the entire learning community. Hopefully it's a more joyful engaging process for us, too, as educators.

Now that I've said all that, it's time for our next segment on partnering with families where we discuss ways to ensure that we are keeping families at the center and the heart of our work. Let's start off the segment by hearing from preschool staff on how they use documentation as central to partnering with families.

[Video begins]

Allison Ferry: Families are really the backbone of what we do. We really value and prioritize family relationships. At the beginning of the year, the first part of that looks like is really setting a good foundation at enrollment of what can families expect, getting to know families.

Nadine Wilkins: What's really exciting is when the teachers meet with the parents, and they show them the portfolio with all the samples of children's work. They really get excited about the progress you see in children, especially the writing samples over the school year. Also, when teachers talk about what they've observed in the classroom, they often ask parents, have you seen that at home also?

Or what kinds of things have your children been doing in certain domain areas. And it's pretty exciting to have a common language to talk about and develop that home-school relationship.

[Video ends]

Becky: OK. When we think about how to intentionally partner with families around observations and documentation and playful environments, it's important to talk with the families about why and how observations are made in the program setting. It's also important to invite families to share what they observe about their children through conversations, or maybe they bring in pictures like Gail had mentioned and photographs.

Or maybe they share in writing in notes in a journal that maybe goes back and forth between the program and the home or an email or text exchanges as allowed by the program communication policies. I also had seen a comment in the chat about comments that parents had made on the ASQ during a home visit. It's important to think about how different ways they

can share observations and invite them to do so in whatever ways feels most comfortable to them.

Another thing we want to keep in mind is that documentation is a way that we can invite families to share what their children are learning and curious about as help. Maybe it's the same as in a program setting, and maybe it's different. It's also another place where this anecdotal record notecard could come in handy where you might make copies of the notecard with your observations on them and share them with families, especially around experiences that the families have said their child is interested in or around something that you have been talking about with the families.

Also, sharing and posting documentation is a great way to support family engagement, having pictures of the children posted in their learning environment or sending pictures electronically can be a great conversation starter for families. And they also are a form of inclusive communication with – when we're thinking about building relationships and partnerships with families who are dual-language or multi-language learners.

Also, providing pictures supports a family in starting a conversation with their child about what they did during the day. And families can ask more questions in addition to "What did you do today?" It can also be a really great way for educators to start conversations with families and find out more about the learning experiences they're having at home. These ways of intentionally partnering with families supports relationship building.

As we are sharing documentation, we send the message that we are a champion for their child, that we appreciate their child, that their child is seen and heard. It also goes a long way, particularly when there are topics that are more delicate to discuss like suspected delays or struggles with a peer or in the learning community.

Saameh: Thank you so much, Becky, for sharing those. Everything you were saying, I was just thinking how important documentation is to be able to have that. Sort of, it's kind of like a bridge to the home, from school to home. It's just so important. Thank you for all of those gems. Once again, we'd love to invite your responses here. We're drawing upon our collective Teacher Time community wisdom.

Please share in the chat what ways do you partner with and learn from families about children's progress. We would love to hear what ways you do that. I'm – as you put those ideas in there, I'm thinking about when I was in the – one of the many preschool classrooms I was in, we had a board of each day; it was a different child's day to kind of like share their pictures or kind of their perspective of what was happening in the classroom.

And that child would use the iPad to take some photos or other ways of sharing maybe through their words, and the teacher would help write those down. Each day one child would be the documenter for the day. The children could share from that child's perspective. We would put it on a bulletin board outside the classroom – this is what was happening in the classroom today. Each child had kind of – to be the – had the chance to be like the reporter of what we did today. That was kind of a cool way.

Let's see what other people say. Home visits conferences. Daily conversations. Yes. That pickup and drop-off. Daily communication folders. Newsletters. Yes. That was happening in the classroom. Seesaw, which I've heard about, seesaw. It sounds like – I think that's an online way. Conferences, newsletters, parent letters. So many great ideas. Thank you for sharing. See? I know that we have that Teacher Time wisdom. It's very precious.

Thank you for keep – bringing those answers in while we go to one of my favorite quotes of all time. We wanted to share an inspiring quote from Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, which some of you might be familiar with. It's an approach to early childhood education that really values and centers that teachers, children, and families are researchers, tinkerers, as we've been talking about, and are all-important parts of the teaching and learning process.

Loris Malaguzzi said, "Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning – and leave room for learning. Observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before." It's kind of nice summary to everything we've been talking about today.

Becky: Now let's go to our BookCASE segment where we highlight books related to our episode's topic. I'm really excited to hear from our Teacher Time librarian, Emily, and see what books she has pulled for us this month. Let's hear from Emily.

[Video begins]

Gail: Hi, and welcome, everyone, to the Teacher Time Library with our very own Teacher Time librarian, Emily Small.

Emily Small: Thanks for having me back.

Gail: We love it when you're here because you always bring great books, and you help make the case for them. Before I turn it over to you, let me remind everybody what the BookCASE stands for. So CASE is actually an acronym that helps us think more intentionally about book selection and book usage with young children. "C" stands for a connection to the ELOF goals and objectives. "A" stands for advanced vocabulary – thinking about how we can teach young children big words and connect them to words they might already know through books.

"S" stands for support engagement. How do we support children's active engagement as we're reading these wonderful books? And "E" stands for extending beyond the books. What activities might we plan or questions we might ask or things we might do that extend the material that we find in these wonderful books. Without further ado, share what books you have with us.

Emily: Yes. Each of these in your viewer's guide, there is a CASE written for them. We're going to look at three of them briefly, and then we'll talk about one more in depth. We'll start with "What If?" "What If?" is the story of a child who is just thinking about all the possibilities of what they can create through art. I love the illustrations because they're mixed mediums. You have actual photographs with illustrations over them.

Gail: Very cool. I love it. Love the bright purple too. It's wonderful.

Emily: Yes, very. It captures your attention.

Gail: Right away.

Emily: Yes.

Gail: Great.

Emily: That's "What If?"

Gail: OK.

Emily: Then we actually have two wordless picture books.

Gail: Wow. Cool.

Emily: Wordless are great for children working on their literacy skills. They're learning how to tell stories with them. They're learning how to read illustrations. They're fantastic for children that – and families where they may not be comfortable reading in English. They can tell the language in their home language.

Gail: Great.

Emily: The first one we have is "Door." This child finds a key, and he enters this magical world. One of my favorite things about this one is that you see – you get the impression at the beginning the child is lonely. All the illustrations are very gray. The child looks kind of sad. Then, as you progress through it, the illustrations become more colorful as he's finding joy and happiness and discovering new things.

Gail: I love that. It's so engaging. Right away, you want to figure out what's happening behind that door.

Emily: Yes.

Gail: Great.

Emily: Our other wordless picture book is another by Christian Robinson, where we have a child and a cat. A portal opens up in the middle of the night. We have a twin cat and a twin child, and they go out on an adventure together. You have to do some close looking at the illustrations to understand what's happening and who's home at what time.

Gail: I love that. Very cool. Two kind of portal books.

Emily: Yes.

Gail: That's cool. Very cool.

Emily: And then the CASE that we're going to make together today is, "What Do You Do With an Idea?" For the "C," the connection, we're encouraging children to let their ideas grow and help them think through what they could do with that idea to come up with.

Gail: Great.

Emily: For the ELOF, that's the social-emotional domain.

Gail: Excellent.

Emily: For advanced vocabulary, we have words like fragile, magical, attention – are just a small sample of what we're seeing. And then, for supporting engagement, be ready to talk about the illustrations. They're very metaphorical. We're seeing the "A" is the idea. This one, also, gorgeous illustrations. For extending is thinking about how are you as the educator supporting children's ideas and fostering children following their ideas in the learning environment.

Gail: Love it. These are another great selection of books. And, like you said, they can find them in the viewer's guide.

Emily: They can find them in the viewer's guide. I should also mention "What Do You Do With an Idea?" is available in Spanish as well.

Gail: Perfect. Great. Thanks, Emily.

Emily: Thanks for having me.

[Video ends]

Saameh: Wow. I always love the books that Emily pulls for us, and I always add them to my personal book list for my 4-year-old son. I can't wait to check those books out at the local library. Excited about the two wordless picture books. Don't forget you can – Oh. Sorry, Becky.

Becky: I didn't mean to interrupt you. But before you go away from this slide, I want to say I actually own this book, too. Well, I purchased this book for my partner, who's an artist, who's not 4. But we have this book as well. It's just such a beautiful, beautiful book, truly, and wonderful for anybody who's creative, which I believe that's all of us.

Saameh: We hope that you will find these books and enjoy them as much as we do. Last and definitely not least, let's turn our attention to you. We do our best caregiving and teaching when we feel well ourselves. Engaging in self-care practices can help educators build greater social and emotional capacity to be present in the moment with preschool children and experience that which we've talked about a lot today, the idea of being present and how important that is for the idea of teacher as researcher, for authentic assessment practices, and also to support the joy of teaching and learning.

Here is one quick strategy that you can use to get into that calm, present space. Let's see. We're going to hear from Dr. Gail Joseph and Dr. Dawn Williams about a strategy we can use in the moment when we are feeling overwhelmed. This strategy can help us to refocus or reconnect with being present in the moment and the practice of observing – observing what is happening. Now here we go.

[Video begins]

Gail: This little strategy is what we call "Notice Five Things."

Dr. Dawn Williams: OK.

Gail: It's a pretty common mindfulness exercise. The idea here is really just to center yourself to connect to the environment.

Dawn: OK.

Gail: And to just think about just what I'm going to tell you to think about.

Dawn: OK.

Gail: This is the time to not think about what you're worried about from what just happened that morning or worried about what's going to happen tomorrow when they come do an observation in your classroom, instead to just be in the moment here. We taught – notice five things.

You just pause for a moment. You look around, and you just notice five things you can see. You might just say, "I see the camera. I see the lights. I see the table. I see the snow globe from one of our other Teacher Time episodes. I see the clicker." It's just noticing five things you can see. Then it's noticing five things you can hear. You really have to pause to do that, right?

Dawn: You do.

Gail: I can hear the traffic. I can hear my breathing. I can hear the click of a keyboard. Just thinking about what I can hear. The last thing is kind of five things that connect with my body. Kind of five body points, if you will. I can notice my feet on the floor, my back against the chair, my watch on my wrist, my shirt on my skin, the air on my face.

It's really just thinking about five things I can see, five things I can hear, and then five kind of body point connections. And doing that in just a moment and doing it at several times during the day. Just let me just notice five things. This is not like I'm taking a break, and I'm going to be in the staff room. This is like I'm going to be right here in the moment, and I'm going to just notice five things.

Dawn: Right.

Gail: What's great about this strategy is that you could teach this to young children as well.

[Video ends]

Saameh: Such important things to remember to do.

Becky: We just want to say a big, big thank you for joining us today and for sharing your wisdom in the chat with our learning community. We hope that you will join us for our next episode on April 4, where we're going to be talking about highly individualized teaching and learning with infants and toddlers. This is going to be a special extended episode where we will have some time for some live Q&A. We hope that you will join us then.

Saameh: Thank you so much, everyone.